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ABSTRACT

This study examined Alabama and Tennessee state education report card data for 1998 through 2003. The purpose of the study was to determine whether there were measurable differences in reported accountability indicators between districts that elected and those that appointed superintendents. The study also examined trends in attrition and hiring or electing of male and female superintendents in city and county school districts. Personal interviews and published research indicated that the district superintendency is often a high-risk position. Turnover may be linked to district performance, as well as to factors not reported on district or state education report cards. The data consisted of accountability indicators for 128 Alabama public school districts and 138 Tennessee public school districts. The analysis used t-tests of statistical significance and a series of regression analyses to identify the relationships among the variables of interest. These included funding sources, student socioeconomic status, expenditure per pupil, and teacher education level. Results indicate significant differences in performance indicators between districts that elected and those that appointed superintendents (Alabama) and between city and county districts with appointed superintendents (Tennessee). Gender was a significant predictor on more indicators for the Tennessee report card data than for Alabama, although females were no more likely to be appointed than elected in either city or county school districts. Data for several high-risk districts, those that had as many as three or four superintendents in a 5-year period, were examined to determine if performance indicators were significantly different than for districts with lower superintendent turnover. Although a district on "Caution" or "Alert" status was linked to superintendent turnover, districts with the highest turnover rates were on "Clear" status. Forty-one percent of appointed and 45% of elected Alabama superintendents remained in office from 1999 to 2003. (Contains 5 tables and 23 references.) (Author/SLD)

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Surviving the Superintendency: What District and State Education Report Cards Can Tell Us

Marie Miller-Whitehead

This study examined Alabama and Tennessee State Education Report Card data for the years of 1998 through 2003. The purpose of the study was to determine if there were measurable differences in reported accountability indicators between districts that elected and those that appointed superintendents. The study also examined trends in attrition and hiring or electing of male and female superintendents in city and county school districts. Personal interviews and published research indicated that the district superintendency is often a high-risk position and turnover may be linked to district performance as well as to factors not reported on district or state Education Report Cards.

The data consisted of accountability indicators for 128 Alabama public school districts and 138 Tennessee public school districts. The analysis used t-tests of statistical significance and a series of regression analyses to identify the relationships among the variables of interest. These included funding sources, student SES, expenditure per pupil, and teacher education level.

Results indicated that there were significant differences in performance indicators between districts that elected and those that appointed superintendents (Alabama) as well as between city and county districts with appointed superintendents (Tennessee). Gender was a significant predictor on more indicators for the Tennessee Report Card data than for Alabama, although females were no more likely to be appointed than elected in either city or county districts. Data for several high-risk districts, i.e., those that had as many as three or four superintendents in a five year period, were examined to determine if performance indicators were significantly different than for districts with lower superintendent turnover. Although a district on "Caution" or "Alert" status was linked to superintendent turnover, districts with the highest turnover rates were on "Clear" status. Forty-one percent of appointed and 45% of elected Alabama superintendents remained in office from 1999 to 2003.

Introduction

Federal, state, and local education policies and legislation have mandated that an enormous amount of statistical data about public schools be collected, compiled, analyzed, and made available to the public at regular intervals, usually each year. Provisions of the recently enacted NCLB Act have further added to the list of federally mandated reporting systems. According to a report by the Council of Chief State School Officers (2000), 40 states produced State Education Report Cards that reported education statistics at the state, district, and school level in the year 2000. While there were many commonalities among the indicators, the categories of each state's report were not identical but represented the diverse goals and resources available to a particular state (Miller-Whitehead, 2002a). The purpose of the present study of Alabama and Tennessee State Education Report Card indicators for the years 1998 to 2003 was to determine if school district superintendent selection and tenure in office were independent of district indicators reported on State Education Report Cards. The study also identified trends in attrition and hiring or electing of male and female superintendents in city and county school districts in Alabama and Tennessee.

The study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What percentage of male and female Alabama and Tennessee superintendents remained in office from 1998-1999 to 2003?

2. Were there significant relationships between superintendent attrition in Alabama and Tennessee and school district accountability indicators?

3. Were school districts with multiple superintendents in a five-year period significantly different in student achievement and other indicators from state averages on these indicators?

Review of Selected Literature

A preliminary review of the literature was conducted with two major focus areas. The first was to determine the propriety of the use of State Education Report Card data not only as a tool for the analysis, but also for public policy and making decisions about school districts, including teacher and school effects and, by extension, superintendent performance. The second was to examine the literature on hiring, tenure, and attrition in the superintendency and the relationships between these and school district indicators and profiles, including district size, student achievement, district revenues and expenditures, and other areas commonly reported on district report cards.

Although accountability indicators provided descriptive information, the advent of so-called high stakes accountability systems encouraged wider use of indicators in causal analysis or cause-and-effect studies to identify linkages between educational inputs, processes, and outcomes, usually as a result of the demands of the courts, business interests, or legislators. This was certainly the case in both Alabama and Tennessee. While there has been considerable debate over high stakes accountability, the fact remained that such accountability systems were put in place to provide for sanctions of schools or school districts that continually failed to meet or improve on state-mandated performance criteria. The question often put forth in response to such initiatives at the federal, state, and local level has been, "is it fair to hold teachers, principals, superintendents, and school boards accountable for student achievement given the diversity of students and

disparities of resources available to the school districts that are responsible for providing them with an adequate educational experience? Additionally, is it fair to hold schools, superintendents, and school boards accountable for raising local revenue in poor districts with few resources?" These questions were particularly relevant given the disparities in funding of school districts in poor and wealthy cities and counties (Miller-Whitehead, 2003).

Extant literature revealed a clear dichotomy in views about student achievement as a valid indicator of school and school district performance because many educators believed high stakes tests as components of accountability systems were counterproductive and harmful. According to Superintendent of Fairfax County Schools Daniel Domenech (2000):

> The issue isn't academic benchmarks, it's the misguided use of a single test. The issue of teaching to these tests has become a major concern to parents and educators. A real danger exists in that the test will become the curriculum and that instruction will be narrow and focused on facts. Much of the criticism against Virginia's Standards of Learning tests has to do with their emphasis on facts and recall. Teachers believe they spend an inordinate amount of time on drills leading to the memorization of facts rather than spending time on problem solving and the development of critical and analytical thinking skills. Teachers at the grade levels at which the test is given are particularly vulnerable to the pressure of teaching to the test.

Domenech was not alone. Other experts in school leadership and testing raised questions about the extent to which a single national or state-mandated high-stakes test could measure accurately what a student had learned or should know. According to one well-known professor of

educational leadership, "aggregate average scores on standardized tests are at best a gross approximation of the instructional quality of a school, and any number of factors may have more to do with the production of this number than the quality of educational services delivered" (Bauer, 2000). Mehrens (2000) observed about high-stakes accountability, "I believe there is a propensity for the public (at least the press) to engage in inappropriate blaming of educators when student achievement is not as high as desired. I am reminded of Browder's (1971) suggestion that accountability boils down to who gets hanged when things go wrong and who does the hanging. Educators have good reason to believe that they are the ones who will get hanged and the public, abetted by the press, will do the hanging." A question this study sought to answer was, "how often were school superintendents the ones who were hung and to what extent, if any, was their demise related to indicators such as student test scores, district revenues and expenditures, or other reported indicators of educational outcomes?"

According to another investigator, "The popularity of published test scores obscures alternative ways of judging schools. In less than twenty-five years, statistical accountability has become so ubiquitous that it appears inevitable. The change has been, in retrospect, both breathtaking and alarming in its speed. Political debate over the meaning of statistics has largely eclipsed other ways of describing what happens in classrooms." (Dorn, 1998).

Although there have been many educators who have questioned the unintended consequences of the modern accountability movement, there has been ample evidence of support for the use of performance indicators, such as student achievement, in education accountability systems. Perhaps the most concrete evidence of support for school performance accountability

has been provided by voters who have passed legislation that mandated it. Fetler (1994) found that:

> States hoped to use performance reports for a number of purposes. Educators could use the information in order to promote school improvement. The reports would motivate parents to lobby school boards, PTA groups, and other organizations to make desired changes. Newspaper comparisons would spur schools to compete for favorable standings.

Was there evidence that accountability systems improved instruction, held teachers, schools, and superintendents accountable, and thus had a positive effect on education outcomes? A brief description of the Tennessee and Alabama accountability systems follows.

To account for various effects that influence student achievement such as district wealth and student demographics, researchers have developed a variety of models in response to critics of the use of high stakes tests or student achievement as evaluation measures of teachers, schools, or school districts and their superintendents. These models have themselves been the subject of extensive review and discussion. Although the Kentucky system is unique among the southern states for several reasons, the value-added models used as components of Tennessee's and Dallas Public Schools' accountability and personnel evaluation systems have perhaps received the most attention, perhaps because both attempt to control for factors such as prior student achievement, ability, and demographics. The Tennessee value-added assessment system was developed in response to a funding equity lawsuit in 1992 in which 66 rural and small school districts sued the state. The voters, legislators, and business supported the school districts, under the condition that all Tennessee superintendents be appointed rather than elected and that teachers, schools, and

school districts be held accountable for results measured by dropout rates, promotion rates, proficiency test passage rates, and improved student achievement (Education Improvement Act, 1992). The statistical model selected as a measure of value-added gain or improvement in student achievement from year to year was a mixed-model time-series methodology developed and piloted by McLean and Sanders of the University of Tennessee at Knoxville (Sanders & Horn, 1995).

Although the Tennessee model has not been without its critics it has undergone rigorous scrutiny by statisticians and testing professionals to assure legislators and the courts that teacher and school effects on student achievement have been evaluated in a fair and equitable way. Popham (1997), in his evaluation of four high-profile accountability systems, found that Tennessee and Dallas were similar in their use of "student achievement as a criterion for both school-focused and teacher-focused evaluation"(p. 267) but agreed that "we can tackle the school-level use of student learning via methods that attempt to compensate for variability among schools" (p. 272). With these concerns in mind, most high-stakes accountability mechanisms also take into account other criteria such as fiscal resources, student poverty, dropout rates, student attendance, discipline data, and promotion and graduation data (Miller-Whitehead, 2002a).

In Alabama, accountability was linked to standardized tests scores, fiscal accountability, and school safety and discipline. Under legislative mandate, intervention occurred when schools that had a majority of students scoring one or more grade levels below the national norm on the state adopted achievement test failed to show improvement for a period of three years, or when schools failed to comply with fiscal or safety and discipline regulations (Education Accountability Plan, 1995). The Alabama State Education Report Card assigned each school and school district

a grade from A to F in each of these areas, and schools as well as school districts were placed on "Academic Caution" or "Academic Alert" status.

The abbreviated review of the literature on high stakes accountability systems indicated that although many educators felt that high stakes tests as components of educational accountability systems were harmful, both Alabama and Tennessee had legislatively mandated educational accountability systems containing school improvement provisions for low-performing schools and school districts. For continually low-performing schools these provisions included transfer of teachers and administrators or takeover by the state. While the emphasis of the majority of accountability mechanisms was on school level accountability, by extension school superintendents and school boards might also be effected if several low-performing district schools failed to improve for a period of several years.

For the purposes of this discussion, attrition was defined simply as superintendent turnover or change, although many researchers differentiate between attrition (movement out of the superintendency) and migration, (a lateral move, movement to another superintendent position). The literature on attrition, migration, and hiring of superintendents was no rosier than the data on accountability. Studies indicated that many superintendents could expect to hold office for no more than 3 or 4 years and most no longer than 6, particularly superintendents in larger, urban school districts where numerous complex issues negated the possibility of simple solutions. Non-renewal of contracts occurred even when superintendents accomplished all goals assigned by the board and student achievement improved dramatically (Castallo, 1999; Patterson, 2000; Vail, 1999). One state school board association reported that it recruited for approximately 120 of 700 superintendent positions (17%) in the state each year (Cunningham & Burdick, 1999).

The same authors also reported that in 1999, 68% of 175 responding superintendents listed school board micromanagement as the main reason they would leave or not apply for a position, while in previous surveys school funding issues were most likely to have caused superintendents to leave their jobs. In the 1999 survey, 47% of superintendents listed diminishing fiscal resources as a major concern. In Tennessee, the fact that 66% of elected superintendents failed re-election provided impetus for the requirement that all superintendents be appointed by the year 1994 (McGriff, Bishop, & Rice, 1998).

In 1999 approximately 12% of school district superintendents in the United States were women, they were usually older than their male counterparts, and women were more likely to be selected for positions in troubled urban districts than men (Vail, 1999) or to be "limited to small, rural ...districts" (Gupton & Slick, 1996, p. 142). In the year 2000, 72% of all K-12 educators in the U. S. were women, although 87% of superintendents were men (Glass, 2000). Only 12% of male superintendents ever taught at the elementary level, while 75% of women educators were elementary school teachers. Additionally, the unofficial path to the superintendent's office has traditionally included a preliminary term as high school social studies teacher and coach, then high school principal, a position fewer than 14% of female educators have held (Vail). Women superintendents were more likely to be hired as instructional leaders than men, who were often perceived as having stronger credentials in fiscal management often because they had handled large budgets as high school principals. Women who served as chief school business officers often did not have teaching credentials or education administration experience and were therefore not considered qualified to be school superintendents (Glass). However, several consultants suggested that school boards that placed priority on improving student achievement could take

advantage of female educators' expertise in instructional leadership and recruit them for the superintendency. According to O'Connell's (2000) longitudinal study of New York superintendent recruiting practices, women comprised only 21% of the applicant pool although they were somewhat more likely to be selected than men once they were in the pool. Data indicated that there was a trend to fewer and less qualified applicants in 1999 than in 1995, often due to retirement of qualified candidates. Highly qualified traditional applicants were often hired by other districts during the selection process. O'Connell concluded that unless the qualification and experience criteria for the superintendency were broadened to include more nontraditional candidates, the trend in hiring only former superintendents, assistant superintendents, and principals would continue.

Miller-Whitehead (2002b) found that from 1999 to 2002 the attrition rate for appointed Alabama school superintendents was 63%, while the rate of superintendent attrition in Alabama school districts on "Academic Alert" was 100%. McGriff, Bishop, and Rice (1997) found that appointed superintendents in Alabama demonstrated a higher degree of specific work-related behaviors than did elected superintendents. They also reported that in the mid-1990's 5% of Alabama school superintendents were women.

Generally, recurring themes of the literature on attrition or migration in the superintendency were leadership style, the importance of effective communications and public relations, and agreement with the board over the difference between policy and administration. Although men frequently reported finding themselves back in the job market after being caught in the crossfire between feuding school board members, several women in top positions discovered that they had been hired for the sole purpose of circumventing pressure from the Office of Civil

Rights by school boards who had no intention of allowing them to serve out their contracts. School boards appeared to evaluate superintendents more often by checklists and rubrics than by indicators such as student achievement, but the literature indicated that not infrequently the contracts of superintendents who had received good evaluations were either bought out or not renewed (Castallo, 1999; Cunningham & Burdick, 1999; Klauke, 1988; Vail, 1999). Grady and Bryant (1991) found that none of the school board presidents they surveyed listed legal, academic, curricular, or fiscal issues as reasons for firing superintendents although they did report that conflict arose over poor communication skills, chain of command issues, and "laziness" when superintendents failed to follow through on board directives. In summary, the literature suggested that school boards were often ambivalent and inconsistent in superintendent evaluations and that personality and leadership style played as important a role as performance evaluations or district indicators.

The review of the literature on school accountability appeared to support its use for the measurement and reporting of teacher and school effects on student achievement. The literature also confirmed the use of State Education Report Card indicators by policymakers to determine acceptable levels of achievement or improvement to state standards. The literature on superintendent attrition provided little evidence, except for districts on "Academic Caution" or "Alert" status, that student achievement was directly correlated to superintendent change, but the emphasis on hiring of superintendents with budgetary experience and problem-solving skills indicated that other district indicators, such as allocation of expenditures and sources of funding, were predictors of changes in the superintendency.

Method

Population

The population consisted of the 128 public school districts of Alabama and the 138 public school districts of Tennessee for the 5 year period between 1998 and 2003. In Alabama, the 61 city superintendents were appointive positions and 40 of the 67 county superintendents were appointive. In Tennessee the superintendents of all the 138 city and county public school districts have been appointive positions since 1994. Additionally, Alabama school district principal change for the same time period was calculated to determine if there was a significant correlation between superintendent change and that of school principals in the same district. The population also included school principal data for each of the public school districts in Alabama, limited to name and school assignment of each principal.

Data

The data consisted of superintendent and district data from the State Education Report Cards of Alabama and Tennessee for the years from 1998 to 2003. The data for superintendents were title, name, and district served. Term in office was computed for a twelve month period to the nearest academic year. School principal data for 1278 Alabama public schools were also examined to identify principals who had moved into superintendent positions within the state of Alabama. Variables were superintendent, principal, district enrollment, per pupil expenditure, percent of students entitled to free or reduced lunch, academic status of district and schools, and student achievement expressed as scale scores, NCEs, value-added, or achievement to ability comparison. Although it would be of interest, the study did not examine discipline data even though school safety has been identified as a specific area of accountability in Alabama. Dropout

data were not available for each year of the study and were not included in the analysis, even though some reports suggested that cohort dropout rates were as high as 45% between grades 9 and 12 for some school districts and a correlation between this variable and administrator change would be of interest.

Design

The school district was the level of analysis for the study although school level data were used for several procedures. Superintendents and principals were matched by name and district code or school code each year to compute attrition rates as well as lateral movement within the state. Indicator variables were screened prior to analysis for normality, missing data, and univariate and multivariate outliers. Where indicated, variables were transformed to reduce skewness and kurtosis. Superintendent status was coded as a dichotomous variable to indicate if the same superintendent held office in 2003 as in 1998-99. A limitation of the study was lack of historical data (i.e., hire date) for those superintendents in office from 1998 to 2003 as they may have served several consecutive years in office prior to the beginning of this study. Several additional years of observation would make more precise predictions possible about length of terms for appointive superintendents in Alabama and Tennessee. Beginning and ending year of service were available for only a limited number of Alabama and Tennessee superintendents for the period of this study, i.e., those who served only one to three years in office. Correlation analyses and t-tests were conducted for multiple years of data to determine relationships among the variables of interest and superintendent turnover.

Table 1 provides percentages of Alabama and Tennessee superintendents by gender for a five-year period. Table 2 provides attrition data for appointed Alabama and all Tennessee

superintendents from 1998-99 to 2003. Table 3 provides correlations between the variables of interest for years between 1998 and 2003. Tables 4 and 5 provide profiles of high-risk Alabama and Tennessee districts, i.e., those that had as many as three or four superintendents in the five-year period from 1998-99 to 2003.

For the Alabama districts with multiple superintendents in a five-year period (Table 4), t-tests and effect sizes were computed to determine the extent to which these districts differed from state averages in respect to student achievement on the SESAT (Stanford 9), achievement to ability comparisons, and ACT scores. For Tennessee districts with multiple superintendents, Table 5 provides student enrollment and district achievement on the TCAP math and language tests as well as on the ACT test, expressed as a grade computed by the State Department of Education for each district. Per pupil expenditure for these districts is also provided.

Results

Table 1 provides percentages of male and female superintendents in Alabama and Tennessee. In Alabama between 13% and 16% of superintendents were women in the years from 1999 to 2003, with no distinct upward or downward trend over the five year period. However, 17% of Tennessee superintendents were women in 1998 compared to 11% in 2003, with a distinct downward trend over a six year period. Although not shown, a series of t-tests conducted with Alabama State Education Report Card data for the years 1999, 2000, and 2001 showed no statistically significant differences for any of these years between male and female superintendents in district student achievement, dropout percent, instructional expenditures, expenditure per pupil, capital outlay percent, or student enrollment. Women were no more likely to be superintendents in city than in county districts in Alabama.

Insert Table 1 about here

In Alabama, where superintendents may be elected or appointed, a series of regression analysis yielded significant results for student achievement on the 2001 administration of the Stanford 9. With student achievement dependent and method of superintendent selection, expenditures per pupil, teacher education level, and percent of federal revenue independent, the regression resulted in an R^2 of .85 and an adjusted R^2 of .71, $F(4, 123) = 80.05$, $p < .001$. The method of superintendent selection (elected or appointed) accounted for 15% of explained variability in student achievement on the Stanford 9 in 2001 but was not significantly related to whether the superintendent remained in office from 1998 to 2003. The results of correlation analyses indicated that none of the variables of student achievement, enrollment, superintendent gender, method of superintendent selection or expenditure per pupil was significantly related to whether the superintendent remained in office from 1998 to 2003 based on 1999 data. However, there was a significant correlation between per pupil expenditure in 2001 and superintendent attrition ($r = .2$, $p < .05$).

Table 2 indicates that appointed superintendent turnover was similar in Alabama and Tennessee, with 41% (n = 36) of appointive Alabama superintendents holding the same office continually from 1999 (or earlier) to 2003 and 47% (n = 65) of Tennessee superintendents holding office from 1998 (or earlier) to 2003. From 2000 to 2003 in Alabama there were 57 new hires among the 88 appointive positions and 23 newly elected superintendents among the 40

elective positions. Forty-two percent of all Alabama public school superintendents remained in office from 1999 to 2003.

Insert Table 2 about here

There was a low positive correlation between turnover in the superintendency and in the principalship ($r = .19$, $p < .05$). Approximately 44% of Alabama public school principals in 1998 were not principals of the same school in 2001. Of these, approximately 13% had moved to principal positions in other schools within Alabama, often in the same district. Of Alabama school principals in 1998, 23 had ascended to the superintendency within the state of Alabama by the year 2003, with 10 elected to office and 13 appointed, representing approximately 18% of public school superintendents within the state of Alabama and 29% of the available superintendent positions during the same period. Five of these 23 were elementary school principals and the other 18 were middle school, junior high, or high school principals. Three of these 23 Alabama school principals who were selected to be superintendents were women (13%).

In Tennessee, with 138 available appointive positions, there were 68 new hires in the years between 1998 and 2003. Results suggest that superintendent turnover in Alabama and Tennessee was approximately 20% annually. In Tennessee, there was a low but positive correlation between superintendent turnover and district enrollment, with higher superintendent turnover in districts with larger numbers of students ($r = .2$, $p < .01$). Although there were significant correlations

among the indicators, there was no evidence that gender of the superintendent, district achievement, student poverty, district expenditures, or type of district (city or county) were statistically significant in superintendent turnover (Table 3). However, women were significantly more likely to be superintendents in city than in county systems in Tennessee each year from 1998 with the exception of year 2003.

Insert Table 3 about here

Table 4 provides several indicators for Alabama school districts that had as many as 3 or 4 superintendents in a five-year period. In several instances these districts had designated an interim superintendent providing some explanation for a one or two year term in office. However, it was of interest to determine if these districts differed significantly from state averages on the selected indicators.

Insert Table 4 about here

Although not shown, the results of t-tests were significant for nearly every indicator and effect sizes were meaningfully large. It was interesting to note that several districts were significantly above the state average on more than one indicator, while four districts were significantly below state averages. The AAC (achievement to ability comparison) indicator provides a method of taking into account the effects of student poverty on academic achievement and thus not unfairly penalize districts with high percentages of free and reduced price meal

students. Only one Alabama district with multiple superintendents from 1999 to 2003 was designated as being on "Academic Alert" status.

Insert Table 5 about here

Table 5 provides information for 5 Tennessee school districts with multiple superintendents in the years from 1998 to 2003. In several instances these districts indicated that interim superintendents had been appointed. Letter grades were assigned for district achievement on a variety of indicators. Those shown in Table 5 are for student achievement on the Tennessee Competency test administered to grade 9 students. In 1999 approximately 65% of Tennessee students passed both the math and language sections on the first attempt. It is interesting to note that four of the five districts listed in Table 5 were above state averages on student achievement indicators but only one of the five districts was above the state average for per pupil expenditure.

Discussion

The data available for the analysis were sufficient to determine that slightly less than half of Alabama (42%) and Tennessee (47%) superintendents had served at least five to six years in office within the same school district. Gender was apparently not a factor in length of term in office for a superintendent. This result supported the conclusion that many superintendents could expect to hold office for no more than 3 or 4 years and the majority no more than 6 (Castallo, 1999; Cunningham & Burdick, 1999; Miller-Whitehead, 2002b; Patterson, 2000; Vail, 1999).

However, the answer to the second research question appeared to be negative: there was little evidence to support the conclusion that school district indicators were significantly related to changes in the superintendency. For the average school district results of the various analyses conducted indicated that superintendent turnover was independent of reported school accountability indicators, including student achievement. This finding supported those who questioned high-stakes accountability mechanisms, particularly those linked to standardized achievement tests (Bauer, 2000; Domenech, 2000; Dorn, 1998; Fetler, 1994; Mehrens, 2000). Superintendent attrition appeared to be directly related to accountability indicators only for those few districts at either end of the performance scale, supporting Castallo (1999), Grady and Bryant (1991), and Klauke (1988) who advocated evaluation of superintendents by scoring rubrics, usually including leadership style and communication skills. Miller-Whitehead (2002b) had found that superintendent attrition was 100% for Alabama school districts designated as on "Academic Alert" status in 2000, an indication that high-stakes accountability did extend to the superintendency for continually low-performing districts.

The majority of Tennessee districts with multiple superintendents in a six-year period were well above state averages in student achievement. In fact, these districts were all significantly different from the state average with very meaningful effect sizes for the differences. In Alabama about half of the high-attrition districts had higher than average student achievement and half had lower than average achievement. These results seem to support the conclusion that superintendents in certain kinds of districts were more likely to leave or retire and that there were, in some cases, fewer than expected qualified applicants for their positions (Cunningham & Burdick, 1999; O'Connell, 2000). Additionally, there was some evidence that competition for

highly-qualified superintendents in districts that did well might result in higher than expected superintendent turnover. Therefore, results of this study appeared to support the conclusion that school district indicators were correlated with higher than average superintendent turnover. The correlation between superintendent and principal attrition within the same district suggested that in some instances superintendents who left a district may have taken some of their principals with them to another district.

A corollary of the study was an examination of gender differences in the superintendency. There was little evidence to suggest that once in office there were significant differences between male and female superintendents as measured by school district indicators. Therefore, even though school boards and recruiters have pursued non-traditional candidates from the ranks of corporate executives, attorneys, and military personnel, there appeared to remain some reluctance to recruit women educators into the superintendency. On a positive note, the percentage of women superintendents in Alabama nearly tripled since the 1990's, up from 5% to 14% in 2003. In Tennessee the trend was the reverse, down from 17% in 1998 to 11% in 2003. Given the fact that school district indicators and student achievement did not appear to be related to superintendent term in office, why then the disparity between percentages of males and females in these top administrative positions?

School superintendents implement policies made by school boards, and school district funding levels are generally determined by county funding agents and local or state referendum, not by the superintendent. Although in the smallest districts superintendents must wear many hats, in larger districts business managers, food service, facilities, and transportation directors oversee school construction, bus routes and maintenance, and cafeteria operations, areas in which many

women (and men) have little experience. And even though school principals, particularly high school principals, generally have a great deal of experience in handling student discipline, a school superintendent rarely if ever is directly involved in a student discipline case. The preference of school boards and recruiters for male applicants for the superintendency apparently was related more to tradition than to performance, particularly given that the majority of the school district budget is dedicated to instruction, an area where women generally have the most experience.

The results of the present study appeared to support those of other studies on the hiring and evaluation of superintendents. School principals appeared to be strong applicants, filling nearly one-third of open superintendent positions in Alabama over the past several years. This finding was consistent with that of O'Connell (2000), who reported that 24% of successful superintendent applicants in New York were school principals, 48% were superintendents, and the remainder were associate, assistant, or interim superintendents. The failure to find significant correlations between district performance and superintendent attrition provided some support for previous research indicating that school boards often terminated superintendents who had received good evaluations, and that personality and leadership style were often as important as performance evaluations or district achievement (Castallo, 1999; Grady & Bryant, 1991; Vail, 1999). Future research might include additional years of data, with followup and historical data for districts that have hired multiple superintendents in a relatively short period of years to determine if districts were competitive in their search strategies, made hasty hiring decisions, or simply had a policy of hiring short-term candidates.

In conclusion, the results of the study indicated that superintendent attrition was unrelated to school district accountability indicators, except in districts with high superintendent turnover.

The disparity between percentage of male and female superintendents was possibly related as much to tradition as to skill areas. On a positive note, results indicated that communities continued to value their schools for qualities in addition to those measured solely by school accountability indicators. However, the use of school district accountability indicators was effective in the identification of both higher and lower than average school district performance and in these instances was related to change in the superintendency.

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Table 1

Percentage of Male and Female School Superintendents in Alabama and Tennessee 1998 to 2003

		1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	Trend
Alabama								
(n = 128)								
	male	--	87%	86%	84%	85%	86%	--
	female	--	13%	14%	16%	15%	14%	--
Tennessee								
(n = 138)								
	male	83%	--	88%	88%	--	89%	↑
	female	17%	--	12%	12%	--	11%	↓

Table 2

Attrition of Appointed Alabama and Tennessee Public School Superintendents, 1999 to 2003.

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003[a]	% in office 1998-2003
Alabama (n = 88)	25%	17%	20%	20%	4%	41% (n = 36)
Tennessee (n = 138)		22%	21%		16%	47% (n = 65)

Note. [a] denotes partial year as of May, 2003.

Table 3

Spearman Correlations for Tennessee Superintendent Attrition and District Indicators (n = 138)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Supt attrition	--	.10	.20**	-.70	.01	.14	.01	.05
District achievement		--	.07	-.55*	.07	-.36**	.51**	.17*
Enrollment			--	-.30**	-.21**	.47**	.31**	.14
Percent Free/Reduced				--	-.18*	.09	-.43**	.02
Superintendent gender					--	-.21**	.08	.10
Type of district						--	-.33**	-.2*
Teacher $							--	.58**
Per Pupil $								--

Note. Based on data from 2000 State Education Report Card. District achievement is an aggregate that includes value-added achievement for each district.

Table 4

Profile of Alabama School Districts with Multiple Superintendents 1999 to 2003

Enrollment	SAT avg	AAC	Status	ACT	N Supts. 1999-2003
1,981	37	5.0	Alert	16.25	3
2,740	40	5.1	Clear	17.03	3
4,628	40	5.1	Clear	17.11	3
22,832	63	5.2	Clear	22.04	3
2,542	73	5.7	Clear	20.93	4
3,872	54	5.2	Clear	20.43	3
10,064	52	5.0	Clear	19.60	3*
2,780	59	5.4	Clear	20.00	3*
2,246	50	5.1	Clear	19.93	3*
Alabama	54	5.2	--	19.83	--

Note. * indicates district with elected superintendent. AAC is Achievement to Ability Comparison computed according to percentage of students receiving free and reduced price meals.

Table 5

Profile of Tennessee School Districts with Multiple Superintendents 1998 to 2003

Enrollment	TCAPM	TCAPL	TCAPBOTH	ACT	PerPupil$	N Supts
3,662	D	D	F	F	5,775	3
4,660	B	B	C	C	5,323	3
6,303	A	A	B	B	6,919	4
2,469	A	A	B	C	5,557	3
19,056	A	A	A	B	5,688	3
TN	--	--	--	--	5,794	--

Note. The TCAPM and TCAPL refer to the Tennessee Competency test in math and language administered to students in grade 9. Students must demonstrate competency in both to receive a regular high school diploma.

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